

The University of Chicago

THE AMERICAN LEGION: A STUDY
IN PRESSURE POLITICS

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

1939

By
DOROTHY CULP

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Growing numbers of citizens and the multiplication of governmental functions in recent years have given increased importance to various types of pressure organizations, formed to articulate and enforce a public opinion. Among modern American pressure groups, perhaps no other single body has attained such fame or realized such a degree of effectiveness as the American Legion.

Founded in 1919 as an answer to the discontent widespread among soldiers in the interval between the end of the war and demobilization, the Legion was designed to perpetuate the associations and assure the dominance of the ideals of the war, to act as a bulwark against radicalism, and to protect the interests of incapacitated veterans.¹ Under the guidance of such rising young politicians as Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and Bennett Clark, and fostered by business leaders,² the American Legion forged ahead of other veterans' organizations³ and assumed the role of spokesman for the ex-soldier which it has maintained for twenty years.

The decision to include all World War veterans, whether they had served at home or abroad, made possible the growth of the Legion until it has during peak years included approximately one million persons among its members.⁴ As the associations of the war faded, other bases for continued membership took their

¹"America's Young Veterans," Outlook, CXXII (May 29, 1919), 43-44; "The American Legion," The Review, I (May 17, 1919), 7; New York Times, August 15, December 15, 1921.

²O. L. Warr, "Heroes' Union," American Mercury, XIII (February, 1928), 169; New York Times, March 6, 18, April 3, 1919.

³Among these were the World War Veterans of America, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Rank and File Veterans' Association, the Combat Veterans of the A. E. F., the Private Soldiers and Sailors' League, and the National Disabled Soldiers' League, all of which admitted only a limited group to their membership (New York Times, March 1, April 21, November 2, December 14, 1919; August 1, October 5, 1921; February 24, 1925).

⁴Membership in the Legion included the following each year:

1920--845,186	1926-- 688,412	1932--931,373
1921--795,799	1927-- 719,852	1933--769,551
1922--745,203	1928-- 760,052	1934--831,681
1923--643,837	1929-- 794,219	1935--842,855
1924--638,501	1930-- 887,754	
1925--609,407	1931--1,053,909	(<u>National Membership Record, 1920-1935</u> [Indianapolis: National Headquarters, The American Legion, 1936]).

place: the attraction of the economic benefits which the organization early began to seek for the ex-soldier and the appeal of social activities served to maintain membership at a fairly constant level. Although the possible membership of the Legion constituted a veritable cross section of America, those who actually joined the organization were largely representative of at least the lower middle class,⁵ and their economic interests, social attitudes, and political outlook were reflected in the Legion's policies and official attitudes on public questions. Although the rank and file of the Legion were recruited largely from the small business group, the leaders of the organization were in general members of privileged social and economic groups.⁶ In addition there were found in the Legion large numbers of politicians who looked upon their membership as a valuable asset to further a political career.⁷

In spite of the eagerness of ambitious politicians to associate themselves with the Legion, that organization resolutely refused to become a "political football." Perhaps warned by the example of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Legion at its founding inserted in its constitution a prohibition against disseminating partisan principles or promoting the candidacy of seekers after public office.⁸ Although adhering resolutely to the enforcement of this provision the Legion accorded it liberal interpretation: individuals were not permitted to hold elective positions in the Legion and the government at the same time,⁹ but

⁵ National Legionnaire, February, 1938.

⁶ William Gellerman, The American Legion as Educator (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers' College, Columbia University, 1938), pp. 52-68.

⁷ "The Legion at Chicago," Christian Century, L (October 18, 1933), 1294-95; New York Times, November 8, 1920; American Legion, National Legislative Committee, Weekly Bulletin, February 16, 1935 (hereafter referred to as A. L. Bulletin).

⁸ George S. Wheat, The Story of the American Legion (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1919), p. 194.

⁹ New York Times, October 7, 1919; February 3, 1921; American Legion, Proceedings of the Fifteenth National Convention, 1933, House Document 154, 73d Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), pp. 21, 49 (hereafter referred to as 1933 A. L. Reports); American Legion, National Constitution and By-laws (Indianapolis: National Headquarters, The American Legion, 1933), Article III.

the Legion insisted upon its right to support or reject the candidacy of aspirants for public office on the basis of their attitude toward Legion policies.¹⁰ Nor did it come within the ban for the Legion to enter the political arena to seek the enactment of legislation beneficial to veterans. Apparently the distinction drawn was between policies and politics.¹¹

Within these self-determined limits the Legion soon became an active political force. In many instances it virtually dictated the government's policy in regard to the ex-soldier. Of prime importance in effecting the Legion's legislative program has been the legislative committee, which under the direction of John Thomas Taylor has emerged as the epitome and model of pressure organizations.¹² Relying solely upon the weight of the membership of the Legion, the legislative committee has in the course of the years since the war perfected its technique in obtaining the passage of bills through Congress. Measures, based upon resolutions passed by the national convention, are often framed by the committee itself and introduced by a selected legislator into the proper house at the instance of the Legion. The legislative committee keeps watchful eye upon its bills as they proceed through Congress. When the bills are before committees, the Legion committee members explain the wishes of their organization and do all in their power to win the approval of the Congressmen. An accurate check is kept upon the attitude of representatives and senators toward Legion legislation, and doubtful Congressmen are often brought into line by a deluge of letters and telegrams inspired by the legislative committee.¹³ With this simple technique the

¹⁰New York Times, September 14, 1920; American Legion, Proceedings of the Sixth National Convention, 1924, House Document 517, 68th Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), p. 23 (hereafter referred to as 1924 A. L. Reports).

¹¹New York Times, November 13, 1919.

¹²Taylor had before the war been a Washington attorney, at one time personal counsel to Boies Penrose, and at various times a lobbyist for different organizations and interests. After the war, in which he rose from the rank of private to that of major, he helped to organize the Legion and was brought to Washington to be professional head of the legislative committee (ibid., September 18, 1932).

¹³Marcus Duffield, "The American Legion in Politics," Forum, LXXXV (May, 1931), 259.

Legion legislative committee has achieved a great degree of success.

Since the legislative committee was dependent upon the united support of the Legion and the good will of the public to attract the favorable attention of Congress to its proposed measures, it has co-ordinated its efforts closely with those of the publicity division. The publicity activities of the organization have been directed in two channels: that appealing to the Legion itself and that destined for general consumption. In the first sphere the Legion has sponsored a series of publications of different sorts: periodicals of general or specific character, and pamphlets written to acquaint Legionnaires with their organization's attitude on controversial issues.¹⁴ In the second sphere the publicity officials found a more difficult task because of the fact that among people at large they had to overcome not only frequent lack of interest but in many cases actual hostility. But the Legion, undaunted by the magnitude of its task, exploited every available opportunity for friendly notice. Newspapers, magazines, the radio, the movie newsreel--all were supplied with carefully planned material designed to present to as large an audience as possible a favorable interpretation of Legion activity.¹⁵ Thus the organization exploited with professional technique and skill every possible avenue of publicity in order to maintain its membership and insure the success of its legislative program.

Foremost in this legislative program was the establishment of an adequate governmental structure for the care of the disabled. The efforts of the Legion on behalf of this unfortunate group have included the provision of adequate hospital care and the assumption by the government of economic responsibility for the disabled and their dependents. The end of the war found the Federal authorities completely unprepared for the task of caring for the disabled. Under the watchful eye of the Legion the Veterans' Bureau was established as an independent agency of the

¹⁴ National Legionnaire, June, 1937.

¹⁵ 1924 A. L. Reports, pp. 70-71; National Legionnaire, October, 1936; American Legion, Proceedings of the Ninth National Convention, 1927, House Document 66, 70th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928), p. 73 (hereafter referred to as 1927 A. L. Reports).

government;¹⁶ evidences of graft and inefficiency were ferreted out;¹⁷ and the Bureau was reorganized to meet changing demands.¹⁸ To the rehabilitation committee in the Legion itself, set up under the professional leadership of Watson Miller, were assigned the duties of aiding veterans to present claims against the government, of insuring effective action by the Veterans' Bureau, and of aiding Taylor and his associates in the passage of an adequate legislative program for the protection of the disabled.¹⁹

The problem of compensation for wounded and other disabled soldiers was one which was brought forcibly to the attention of the Legion soon after its organization. The war risk insurance act had been passed during the war to make provision for them and for the dependents of those who died in the war.²⁰ But with the end of the conflict it was immediately apparent that the scale of payments outlined in the act was woefully inadequate. Consequently the Legion led the fight for a more generous system of compensation by the increase of sums allotted and the extension of the number of those presumed to be entitled to benefits because of disability incurred in or resulting from service. The first liberalizing step taken by Congress at the instance of the Legion was embodied in the Sweet Act, by which monthly payments to the totally disabled were increased from thirty dollars to sixty dollars, and the period was extended from one to two years within which a veteran might claim "service connection" for his disability.²¹ The

¹⁶U. S. Statutes at Large from April, 1921, to March, 1923, Part I, Public Laws (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), XLII, 147-57.

¹⁷New York Times, March 18, June 17, 1923; R. M. Field, "The Nation's Disabled Sons," Outlook, CXXXIV (August 29, 1923), 673; U. S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Investigate the Veterans' Bureau, Investigation of the Veterans' Bureau, pursuant to S. Res. 466, 67th Cong., 4th Sess., Senate Report 103, 68th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924).

¹⁸Congressional Record, LXV, 11201; LXXII, 5024, 12511; President of the United States, Executive Order, Consolidation and Co-ordination of Governmental Activities affecting Veterans, July 21, 1930, No. 5398.

¹⁹1933 A. L. Reports, p. 174.

²⁰U. S. Statutes at Large from April, 1917, to March, 1919, Part I, Public Laws (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), XL, 398-411.

²¹American Legion, Second Annual Report of the National Officers, 1920 (publisher not named, n. d.), p. 9 (hereafter referred to as 1920 A. L. Reports).

passage of the Reed-Johnson bill in 1924 extended the period of presumptive service connection for tuberculous and neuropsychiatric diseases to January 1, 1925.²² In the following five years, as a result of the Legion's urging, perfective amendments were passed which widened still farther the application of the compensation system.²³

Finally in 1931 the principle of compensation for disability incurred in service, no matter how indirectly, was abandoned in a measure sponsored not by the Legion but by the Administration. This law provided "disability allowances" for totally disabled veterans without means of support, regardless of the origin of the disability.²⁴

But this abrupt change in policy was not to continue long without challenge. Continued depression brought the government face to face with the necessity for economy, and the feeling was widespread that public aid to the disabled had been extended far beyond the demands of justice and equity. Consequently the issue of executive orders by President Roosevelt in 1933 rigidly restricting the number entitled to compensation and cutting the sums allotted came as no surprise to observers.²⁵ The Legion vigorously protested this return to the limited aid of the early twenties and led the fight for the amelioration of these orders.²⁶ The organization demanded that there be no reduction in compensation for service connected disabilities, that the presumed service connection granted before the Roosevelt orders be perpetuated, and that benefits for veterans' dependents be resumed at the former scale.²⁷ In the course of the next few years the agitation of the Legion resulted in the restoration of benefits to all those

²²Congressional Record, LXV, 11201; 1924 A. L. Reports, pp. 2, 6, 155.

²³Congressional Record, LXVI, 5068, 5270, 5619; LXVII, 574, 9486, 9565, 12096, 13093; LXVIII, 1257, 3811; LXIX, 988, 3489, 5803, 7475, 10888; LXX, 4922.

²⁴New York Times, July 2, 3, 4, 1930; Congressional Record, LXXII, 12534.

²⁵New York Times, March 10, 11, 21, 1933; Congressional Record, LXXVII, 125, 129; 1933 A. L. Reports, pp. 16, 209, 222.

²⁶New York Times, May 11, 1933; 1933 A. L. Reports, p. 226.

²⁷Ernest Angell, "The Legion's Betrayal," Nation, CXXXVI (May 24, 1933), 485; 1933 A. L. Reports, p. 33; New York Times, June 30, 1933.

whose disabilities had been deemed presumably service connected before 1933, the re-establishment of full payment to directly service disabled, and the restoration to a limited degree of the disability allowances granted in 1930.²⁸

Although the Legion directed its main activity in the field of disability compensation to the efforts just described, it also sought to defend the rights of a small special group--the disabled emergency army officers. Strangely enough the organization found itself involved here in one of its most bitter conflicts, and the success of the Legion in obtaining retirement at three-quarters pay for these disabled men was the more remarkable since this legislation would benefit a numerically small group, completely without political power or prestige and without influence.²⁹ The economy efforts of 1933 cut down the number entitled to this special benefit,³⁰ and in spite of Legion efforts, the present time finds the disabled emergency army officers provided for on a less liberal scale than the Legion advocates. They are entitled to compensation on the same basis as enlisted soldiers, but only those whose disabilities are directly service connected receive the special retirement pay.³¹

At the end of the war the government was also unprepared to meet the task of hospital care for those whose bodies and minds had been injured during the war. Not only was it necessary to furnish adequate care for those who might eventually take their normal places in society, but provision had also to be made for those who were incurable. For the construction of these hospitals the Legion can take a large share of the credit. Its agitation has been to a considerable degree responsible for the extension of hospital facilities to presumptively service connected disabled veterans and to an increasingly large number of veterans

²⁸Congressional Record, LXXVIII, 5540-44, 5606; New York Times, March 28, 29, 1934.

²⁹Congressional Record, LXIX, 4825, 8464, 9673, 9679; American Legion, Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention, 1928, House Document 388, 70th Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929), p. 145 (hereafter referred to as 1928 A. L. Reports).

³⁰1933 A. L. Reports, pp. 179, 224, 270.

³¹A. L. Bulletin, May 12, 1938; American Legion, Reports to the Twentieth Annual National Convention, 1938 (Indianapolis, 1938), p. 256 (hereafter referred to as 1938 A. L. Reports).

who did not trace their disabilities either directly or indirectly to the war.³² When the depression and resultant economy legislation threatened the carefully built program of hospitalization, the Legion led the fight for the restoration and maintenance of hospital privileges for all veterans.³³ Also the Legion sponsored a planned program of hospital construction which was designed to meet the needs of the disabled rather than of political expediency.³⁴ It is a tribute to the Legion as well as to the Veterans' Administration that the affairs of that government body have been handled since 1924 with a minimum attention to politics and a maximum to the problems of the disabled.

Although the Legion considered its first obligation to be the protection of the disabled, it also was zealous in obtaining benefits for the whole group of veterans. The problem of the re-absorption of ex-soldiers into civil life was one of the first to which the organization gave its attention. The public service and private industry were canvassed to obtain positions for ex-service men. The civil service offered the possibility of work for these men, and the Legion was persistent in its demand for veterans' preference in appointment and promotion in this branch of government employ.³⁵ As a result of Legion efforts a far greater proportion of veterans than of citizens at large obtained positions in the civil service.³⁶ Other government jobs were also pre-

³²Congressional Record, LXV, 11201; New York Times, May 26, 1925.

³³1933 A. L. Reports, p. 259; New York Times, January 20, 1934.

³⁴1924 A. L. Reports, pp. 200-201; Congressional Record, LXV, 10211-15.

³⁵1920 A. L. Reports, pp. 200-201.

³⁶The following statistics show the number of veterans appointed to the classified service:

Year	No. Preference Appointments	Number Appointed	Per Cent Veter- ans Appointed
1919-20	15,750	115,770	13.60
1920-21	29,250	101,164	28.91
1921-22	18,760	62,488	30.02
1922-23	19,137	56,087	34.12
1923-24	17,029	65,625	25.95
1924-25	11,404	48,804	23.37
1925-26	8,000	36,992	21.63
1926-27	9,947	38,777	25.65
1927-28	9,208	37,796	24.36
1928-29	11,578	44,817	25.83
1929-30	9,269	38,281	24.21
1930-31	10,063	38,641	26.16
1931-32	6,460	21,499	30.11
1932-33	3,275	10,403	32.98

(1934 A. L. Reports, p. 208).

empted for those who had fought in the world war, and preference was granted to this group in the settlement of public lands.³⁷ Especially in time of economic distress the Legion extended its attention to private industry. Appeals to the public spirit of employers were supplemented by somewhat more fundamental activities such as the stimulation of buying to end depression and so relieve unemployment.³⁸ Thus the government service and private industry both responded to Legion pressure as the organization bent its strength to the reabsorption of the service-men into civil life and to the maintenance of their economic security and welfare.

The almost hysterical enthusiasm with which the soldiers returning from the war were greeted was soon translated into the concrete terms of money payment by those who sincerely believed the veterans were entitled to tangible reward and those politicians who saw in the mass of ex-service men a potential source of votes which could be influenced by favorable legislation. At first the typical soldier's attitude was that no monetary reward was suitable for service to one's country, but he soon discovered that the hero rôle was but a poor substitute for the opportunity to fit smoothly once again into civilian life. The Legion, as the representative veterans body, experienced a similar change of attitude. At first refusing the suggestion of the bonus,³⁹ the organization soon announced its confidence that Congress would discharge its obligation to the returned soldiers.⁴⁰ But the Legion soon realized that a stronger stand would be necessary if adjusted compensation were to become a fact, and made outright demands for the passage of a bonus bill.⁴¹

It was not until 1924, however, that the Legion gained sufficient strength to push through this benefit for all world war veterans in the face of the opposition of the executive divi-

³⁷"The American Legion: Its Convention and Its New Commander," Outlook, CXXIII (November 26, 1929), 348; New York Times, July 9, 1928.

³⁸Huddle, April, 1929; January, 1931.

³⁹George P. Putnam, "The Birth of the American Legion," Outlook, CXXII (May 21, 1919), 105.

⁴⁰Roger Burlingame, Peace Veterans: The Story of a Racket and a Plea for Economy (New York: Milton Balch and Co., 1932), p. 34.

⁴¹1920 A. L. Reports, p. 28; New York Times, February 11, 19, 1920.

sion of the government, the urban press, and vocal minorities. At that time the long fought battle ended in victory for the Legion, and provision was made for the deferred payment of adjusted compensation, the amount of which was based upon the length of service.⁴²

Not content with the measure for adjusted compensation, the Legion was also active in obtaining the prepayment of the certificates. In this activity it was not alone, for political leaders and the Veterans of Foreign Wars had initiated the demand long before the Legion added its voice to the clamor for prepayment. The ruling group of the Legion at first preferred to seek the extension of borrowing privileges, and it was only as a result of an overwhelming demand by the organization's rank and file that the objections of the leaders were overcome.⁴³ Once the Legion came out in favor of prepayment of the certificates it threw the weight of its entire organization into the fight, and the law which was passed in 1936 took the form prescribed by the Legion, in spite of strenuous opposition by advocates of other plans and by those who were against prepayment in any form.⁴⁴

Final provision for the immediate redemption of the compensation certificates brought to the fore the question of general pensions. The Legion had early expressed its official disapproval of general pensions for veterans of the World War,⁴⁵ advocating instead a liberal policy toward the disabled and their dependents and the award of adjusted compensation to all eligible veterans. Pessimists were not convinced by these protestations. They pointed out that the increasing liberalization of the government policy, resulting as it had from Legion agitation, would reach its logical conclusion in regular payments to all veterans.⁴⁶

Second only to its preoccupation with the securing of benefits for veterans was the Legion's interest in protecting the United States from enemies both at home and abroad. To some ex-

⁴²Congressional Record, LXV, 8808-14, 8819, 8825, 8844, 8869; New York Times, April 25, May 18, 20, 1924; 1924 A. L. Reports, p. 226.

⁴³New York Times, August 20, September 21, 22, 1931; August 17, 28, 29, 30, September 10, 11, 1932; "The Legion Raid," Christian Century, XLIX (September 28, 1932), 1160.

⁴⁴A. L. Bulletin, January 14, 29, 1936; Congressional Record, LXXX, 292, 703, 975-76.

⁴⁵New York Times, January 10, 1924; National Legionnaire, March, 1936.

⁴⁶New York Times, May 6, 1931; January 12, 1936.

tent the efforts of the organization in both these directions were the same, for it believed that many of the radicals whom it considered enemies of the country's welfare also seemed to threaten its defenses by their pacifist teachings. In its attitude toward national defense, the Legion has frequently been termed militaristic. The organization itself has protested the epithet, insisting that no group in the country was more keenly aware of the terrors of war or more anxious for peace. But according to the Legion, while the pacifist's dream was a splendid one, his methods of attaining that goal were such that dependence upon them was futile.⁴⁷

The army, of course, was of primary importance in the maintenance of a protective system of national armament, and from its organization the Legion has been persistent in its demand for an adequate military force. The Regular Army, the National Guard, the Citizens' Military Training Camps, the Officers' Reserve Corps, and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps all were objects of the Legion's attention. In unison with other "big army" groups, the Legion consistently pushed for additions to the personnel of these various branches of the military force,⁴⁸ but not until the middle thirties did the tense situation in Europe lead to the accretion which the organization had demanded for so many years.⁴⁹

While the first concern of the Legion in regard to the army was the maintenance of an adequate personnel, in the case of the navy its preoccupation was with the building up of equipment. Although the Legion was emphatic in its demand that the navy be maintained on a parity with those of other nations, it was willing that this parity be attained by international agreement for the reduction of naval armaments.⁵⁰ Such reduction was not attained, however, and the Legion concentrated its efforts upon an attempt

⁴⁷1924 A. L. Reports, p. 106; Richard Washburn Child, "Bulwarks against War," American Legion Monthly, III (September, 1927), 14-17.

⁴⁸New York Times, January 27, April 20, 1922; American Legion, Proceedings of the Thirteenth National Convention, 1931, House Document 48, 72d Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), p. 63 (hereafter referred to as 1931 A. L. Reports).

⁴⁹Congressional Record, LXXIX, 3464; A. L. Bulletin, January 24, February 16, 1935.

⁵⁰Congressional Record, LXVI, 3748; A. L. Bulletin, February 16, 1938.

to increase the navy to treaty strength.⁵¹ The war scares of the middle thirties at last crowned this agitation with success, and large appropriations made possible the construction of new ships.⁵² In addition to the maintenance of a large enough fleet to defend continental United States the Legion also gave its attention to subsidiary factors such as the maintenance of an adequate naval personnel, the training of a potential force for war time through the merchant marine and naval reserve, and the development of naval bases.⁵³

Modern technical development provided a third department of national defense--the air. The Legion was vociferous in its demand that the air forces of the nation be developed on a par with the other branches of national defense.⁵⁴ Just as in the case with the traditional branches of army and navy, the Legion's efforts to increase the military air force of the country did not meet with complete success until the thirties when international tension and the long continued agitation of such groups as the Legion induced Congress to vote for substantial additions to the nation's fighting strength in the air.⁵⁵ Interested though the Legion was in military and naval aviation, it realized that for practical reasons a large part of the development of an air force potentially available for national defense should be carried on by civilian enterprise. Consequently aviation enthusiasts found in the veterans' organization valuable allies for their varied attempts to encourage commercial aviation: the extension of the air mail service,⁵⁶ government appropriations for scientific research,⁵⁷ and encouragement of the use of aircraft in business.⁵⁸

The maintenance of the army, navy, and air forces at a

⁵¹Frederick Palmer, "A Personal View," American Legion Monthly, II (June, 1927), 41.

⁵²A. L. Bulletin, May 12, 1938.

⁵³Ibid., September 12, 1935.

⁵⁴Congressional Record, LXV, 10068, 11273; LXVI, 3748; 1924 A. L. Reports, p. 216.

⁵⁵Congressional Record, LXXXI, 3966, 6815.

⁵⁶1924 A. L. Reports, p. 115.

⁵⁷Congressional Record, LXV, 1538; 1924 A. L. Reports, p. 216.

⁵⁸Congressional Record, LXIX, 3259; LXXII, 7339; LXXIV, 5876; LXXVIII, 6247; LXXXI, 6422; A. L. Bulletin, September 12, 1935.

level adequate for national defense commanded the serious attention of the American Legion, but it was not so exclusively a matter of Legion interest as were the universal draft proposals for which the organization fought almost singlehanded from its very founding in the year after the war. Lessons of profiteering, inadequate and inefficient supply, and the lack of co-operation in the emergency had been learned at dear cost by those who had fought in the World War, and they were insistent that such handicaps should not face those who might at some future date have to take up arms for their country. The theory involved in the so-called universal draft was that all resources of the country which would be involved in the successful prosecution of a war should be subject to draft in time of national emergency, as were those who made up the actual fighting forces.⁵⁹ The Legion was under no illusion as to the revolutionary character of its proposal or as to the strength of the opposition to such a radical change in national policy. Consequently the legislation was at first pushed slowly by the organization, which adopted a policy of keeping the idea before the public and conducting an "educational campaign" to acquaint the American people with the Legion's idea and motives in backing such legislation.⁶⁰ The scheme was opposed by moneyed interests who saw in the proposal a threat to profits; it was opposed by working men who saw in it a threat to the hard won position of organized labor; it was opposed by liberals who believed it contained a threat to democracy.⁶¹ But in spite of this opposition the idea of the universal draft has progressed slowly toward realization. Although the proposal has not been enacted into law, the long period of education of public opinion has apparently begun to bear fruit in the willingness of Congress to consider the question seriously.⁶²

Necessary as the Legion considered the protection of the

⁵⁹New York Times, March 12, 1924; 1924 A. L. Reports, p. 294; Congressional Record, LXVI, 2730-32, 2734-35.

⁶⁰American Legion, Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention, 1926, House Document 553, 69th Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1927), p. 73; American Legion Monthly, I (September, 1926), 34-35.

⁶¹New York Times, October 15, 1929; A. L. Bulletin, February 26, 1938.

⁶²Congressional Record, LXXXIII, 3269; A. L. Bulletin, March 24, May 12, 1938.

United States from potential enemies abroad, it found a more immediate threat to the institutions of this country in the activities of those it deemed enemies at home. It is probably in the sphere of the Americanism program that the organization has exerted its most potent influence upon American life. Representing as it does the middle-class, small town, small business group, the Legion has had as its most important function in modern society the perpetuation of the ideals and beliefs of that group. It has lent the great strength of its organization to the articulation of the individualistic, patriotic, conservative philosophy held generally by its membership.

In attempts to make its Americanism the dominant ideology in the United States, the Legion has entered many fields of activity. That which has attracted the widest publicity has been the somewhat negative one of suppression of the un-American. In the years immediately after the war the policy of suppression was directed against suspected German propaganda efforts.⁶³ With the passage of time, however, the fear of German ideas faded, and the Legion concentrated its attention upon pacifism and radicalism. These un-American attitudes, never very well defined, the Legion has found in widely differing groups. The churches, women's clubs, schools, a number of liberal organizations, labor unions, and itinerant agricultural workers--all have at one time or another been declared suspect by the Legion.⁶⁴

The technique of suppression has changed with the passing of the years. In the beginning the Legion, its members recently returned from a scene where action was substituted for law, tended to perpetuate a preference for direct action in civilian life.⁶⁵ Soon, however, the incongruity of the defense of law and order by illegal methods became apparent, and the Legion at least officially turned to orderly legal means to suppress radicalism.⁶⁶ For this purpose the organization has in specific cases urged the police to action to maintain order and has backed bills in national and

⁶³New York Times, September 24, 25, 27, 1919; Arthur Warner, "The Truth about the American Legion," Nation, CXIII (July 6, 1921), 9.

⁶⁴Huddle, June, 1931; New York Times, February 27, 1936.

⁶⁵"Another Warning to the American Legion," Literary Digest, LXIII (December 27, 1919), 18-19; "The Legion's War on Disloyalty," ibid. (November 29, 1919), p. 10.

⁶⁶New York Times, December 23, 26, 1919.

state legislatures, the purpose of which was to make more difficult propagandizing by radicals and radical groups.⁶⁷

The Legion also sought by the simple expedient of exclusion to prevent the appearance in American life of so-called un-American elements. So direct a policy could be effective only against aliens, and it was against alien Communists and incidentally in later years Fascists that the organization directed its strict immigration and deportation policy.⁶⁸ Still more stringent action was advocated against Russia, which was regarded as the point of origin of the Communist propaganda which the Legion feared in the United States.⁶⁹

The more spectacular and negative aspects of the Legion's activities against radicals have pushed into the background the constructive phases of the Americanism program. Although it believed that Un-American attitudes should disappear from the American scene, the organization realized that in addition to the direct suppression of such ideas, a program of countereducation would have to be undertaken, the purpose of which would be the substitution of the ideals of the Legion for those of the radicals. Under the direction of its Americanism Commission, the Legion has worked out such a program, designed to appeal not only to the contemporaries of the veterans but to the young people of the nation. To keep alive the spirit of patriotism the veterans' organization sponsored the public celebration of national holidays,⁷⁰ advocated the designation of the "Star Spangled Banner" as the national anthem,⁷¹ and demanded the enactment of a flag code and a campaign of flag education which should instill respect for the nation's symbol.⁷²

⁶⁷1920 A. L. Reports, p. 115; Huddle, July, 1934; National Legionnaire, February, 1935.

⁶⁸New York Times, February 27, 1923; A. L. Bulletin, March 20, 1936; 1931 A. L. Reports, pp. 18, 184.

⁶⁹American Legion, Proceedings of the Fourteenth National Convention, 1932, House Document 17, 73d Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1933), p. 53; New York Times, November 18, 1933.

⁷⁰American Legion, Proceedings of the Seventh National Convention, 1925, House Document 243, 69th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 144; New York Times, May 30, 1924; Huddle, November, 1929.

⁷¹1924 A. L. Reports, p. 240; 1931 A. L. Reports, pp. 230-31.

⁷²1924 A. L. Reports, pp. 42-43, 127; 1925 A. L. Reports, pp. 38-42.

Recognizing that feelings of patriotism could best be maintained if individuals were made to feel that they had a share in community life, the Legion also suggested that its posts engage in such types of community service as would best meet local needs. The establishment of public parks, playgrounds, and swimming pools, aid in "Community Chest" campaigns, the conduct of "keep the city clean" drives, and a host of other activities not only gave members of the Legion posts a constructive and worth-while program in a sphere sufficiently small and close at hand that results could be readily observed, but also offered a splendid opportunity for service whereby the Legion could consolidate its position in the community.⁷³

In the belief that patriotism was not only an attitude of mind but an incentive to action the Legion sponsored a series of good government campaigns. These had two purposes: to encourage an intelligent selection of representative public officers, and to acquaint people with their duties as citizens.⁷⁴ The Legion also sought to give concrete expression to devotion to country by the establishment of emergency units designed to aid in rehabilitation from natural disasters.⁷⁵

The Legion was seeking a larger goal than the maintenance of its ideals during the life of the war generation. That this spirit of Americanism might be perpetuated the organization undertook a program designed to inculcate on the minds of the young people of the country the devotion to the United States which was so zealously fostered in the Legion itself. First obligation was of course to the orphaned or half-orphaned children of fellow soldiers, and for the economic welfare of this group the Legion assumed responsibility.⁷⁶ In addition the organization was active in promoting laws for the protection of the physical well-being and economic security of all children.⁷⁷

⁷³American Legion, Reports to the Sixteenth Annual National Convention, 1934 (Indianapolis, 1934), p. 31.

⁷⁴New York Times, August 2, October 12, 1926; "Keeping Step," American Legion Monthly, I (October, 1926), 54; 1928 A. L. Reports, pp. 114-15.

⁷⁵Huddle, June, 1929; January, 1930; The American Legion in Time of Disaster (Indianapolis: National Americanism Commission, American Legion, 1937), p. 4.

⁷⁶John R. Quinn, "What the American Legion Is Doing," Outlook, CXXXVII (July 9, 1924), 397-98.

⁷⁷1924 A. L. Reports, p. 216; 1934 A. L. Reports, p. 49; Emma Puschner, Child Welfare Guide (4th ed. rev.; Indianapolis:

But this was only a preliminary in the Legion's intention to educate the children of America to its beliefs. Such leisure activities as the Boy Scouts, the Sons of the American Legion, and the Junior Baseball Tournaments provided opportunity for close personal contact between Legionnaires and young people and for the personification of the ideal--which was more effective with youngsters than the presentation of abstract ideals.⁷⁸ The Legion did not, however, confine its attention to the leisure activities of boys and girls. Foremost among the institutions in which it sought to implant ideals of Americanism were the schools of the country. The opposition to radical teachings in these institutions, the attempted supervision of patriotic history textbooks, the sponsoring of teachers' oath bills, the sharing in National Education Week--all were intended to counteract liberal and radical ideas in the schools and to substitute the Legion's patriotism.⁷⁹

Thus the Legion by its actions and attitudes has done much to maintain and preserve this set of beliefs which it has labeled Americanism. The intangible influence which the organization exerts is partly the result of conscious effort by which it strives to build the kind of America in which it believes, and partly the result of the added force gained by individual opinions and philosophies through organization, consolidation, and articulation.

The Grand Army of the Republic is said virtually to have ruled the United States for thirty years after the end of the Civil War. The Legion, unhampered by the obligation of allegiance to a particular political party, and with a much larger membership and a greatly improved technique for pressure politics, has steadily increased its power during the last twenty years, and in the next twenty bids fair to occupy a position fully as important as that held by the older veterans' group at the height of its power.

National Child Welfare Division, American Legion, n. d.), p. 9.

⁷⁸New York Times, March 28, 1924; 1924 A. L. Reports, p. 3; 1925 A. L. Reports, pp. 192-93.

⁷⁹Bessie Louise Pierce, Public Opinion and the Teaching of History in the United States (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1926), pp. 269-75, 329-33; see also Gellerman, The American Legion as Educator.

